

#EFFYOURBEAUTYSTANDARDS: MESSAGE CONSTRUCTION IN THE BODY
POSITIVITY MOVEMENT ON INSTAGRAM

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Abstract

Beauty is a socially constructed concept that delineates specific characteristics of physical appearance which are to be perceived as aesthetically pleasing. In Western cultures, the ideal of this constructed beauty can be found to center on thinness. Reinforced through media images, the thin ideal can lead to internalization and increased body dissatisfaction in female viewers. To counteract body dissatisfaction resulting from internalization of these ideals, advocates on the social media platform Instagram can be seen to popularize the concept of body positivity. The resulting social movement aims at enabling individuals who do not fit the normed thin ideal to develop a benevolent approach to their physique. In the analysis of a sample of 280 Instagram posts concerned with the body positivity movement, a clear trend towards an adjusted construction of self-presentation was observed that clearly differs from socially enforced norms of beauty and ideal body size. When constructing posts that are concerned with body positivity, users of Instagram adjust the creation of their digital personality to fit the norms of imperfection and honesty inherent in the movement. Interviews conducted by the researcher further confirmed that the public recognizes that the messages communicated within this movement reveal personal stories and insecurities to both function as inspiration and motivation to the audience while also constituting a means of receiving validation.

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Introduction

Social media is undeniably becoming an increasingly important factor to consider when exploring the structure of today's society. With the advance of technology and based on our ability to have the entirety of the Web 2.0 available wherever we carry our cellphones, social media and social media platforms now constitute a major social influence. Societal trends, cultural norms, and urgency of issues are shaped by the user generated content in these openly accessible online environments. The public no longer dedicates platforms such as Instagram or Facebook to their entertainment and personal leisure but sees it as a means to express their concerns, address social issues, and promote public opinion. Now more than ever, users actively participate in shaping the structure of their society, thus collectively directing focus to issues that are of direct concern to them. The constant exposure to these broadly communicated topics in the environment of social media platforms can thus not only shape perceptions in a wide spectrum of society but has pervasive effects on the individual user as well. When accessing social media, users' focus is directed by what other users portray as important. Social media platforms become a means of influence, of communication, and constitute an aid to guide society's attention.

My own interest in physical health and fitness, for instance, was very much guided by the inspiration and information I sought on Instagram. What I initially perceived as a good resource to supplement my real-life interest, I came to view as highly problematic because perception on social media platforms is ultimately relative; physical appearance is easily manipulated to lead others to favorable impression. In the world of fitness, individuals focus on communicating perfection, success in their fitness journey, and oftentimes wrongly portray themselves in a manner that is mostly unachievable for the average individual. This ease of manipulating physical appearance to leave favorable impressions and receive positive feedback from other

users, poses the question whether social media platforms can also function as a stage to counteract this tendency. It became of interest to me to explore the side of Instagram that not only moves away from physical perfection but also explicitly advocates for the more honest portrayal of the human body. The body positivity movement quickly surfaced as the main hub of this countermovement on Instagram.

Literature Review

The Phenomenon called Social Media Platforms

Every day, over 2.8 billion people access social media platforms worldwide (Kemp, 2017). May it be to keep up with old acquaintances or to establish new connections - extensive parts of societal interactions now take place in these virtual environments. By connecting with other users within the virtual environment, people choose to display the ties they have formerly initiated in direct face-to-face interactions, “as personal (or ‘egocentric’) networks, with the individual at the center of their own community” (Boyd & Ellison, 2008, p. 219). Social media platforms, i.e. “web-based services” (Boyd & Ellison, 2008, p. 211), allow users to create a profile that functions as the basis to visualize social connections as a list and to view other users’ networks within the system. They are then able to access a variety of content, defined as social media within the bound system of the platform (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Creating social capital. As a result of these connections within a social media platform, people are able to manage their social capital within a virtual system. Social capital can be understood as resources to which an individual has access because of their relationships with other people (Ellison, Steinfeld, & Lampe, 2007). Depending on the strength of the tie between two people, resources can manifest in the form of useful information, personal relationships, or connections to other individuals (Paxton, 1999). In the online environment, the management of personal social capital is not only visualized within the network but takes on new forms through the innovative online structures of social media platforms (Resnick, 2001). Users, for instance, communicate their social network through a list of connections which is accessible to other users within the system. This visualization of social capital is unique to social media platforms and shows the connections a person has. Another way to display social capital is through a list of

followers, a version of the friends list. Here, however, while a friends list communicates the connectedness between two people, following is not mutual. Following a person on a social media platform does not ensure that this person will also follow back. As technology and opportunities for web-based progression move forward, new social media platforms are developed and existing ones frequently revise their applications and services to enhance their users' virtual experience. These updates include editing images, displaying personal interests, and sharing or creating content. With the help of these advanced applications, the exposure to a constant influx of digital information, imagery, and audio has become the new normal of communication in western society. Accordingly, there are various types of social media that a user may employ to create content, among which are texts, pictures, audio or video files, as well as hypermedia in the form of links and tags (Kane, Alavi, Labianca, & Borgatti, 2014). However, these fundamental tools of message construction create a number of difficulties unique to the virtual environment of social media platforms.

Message construction in the online environment. Online environments, such as social media platforms, allow users to construct and communicate messages in various ways. The multi-media approach of social networking sites redefines message construction through a combination of videos, images, and text; interpreting these media is, “an active process in which context, social location, and prior experience can lead to quite different decodings” (Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes, & Sasson, 1992, p. 374). Due to the asynchronous nature of messages in an online context, their creators have very limited influence on the reception of the message and limited tools to clarify intent. Gamson et al. (1992) further state that, “the social constructions here rarely appear as such to the reader and may be largely unconscious on the part of the image producer as well” (p. 374). Hence, although the creator of an image attempts to construct a

certain message through the combination of visual and textual cues, the final interpretation cannot be fully anticipated and can potentially convey an entirely different meaning to the viewer. This complication in the construction of messages is taken a step further when considering the interpersonal level of this type of communication. Since the direct, immediate nature of personal interactions is mostly taken away in the social media environment, users have to rely on a different set of tools to manage the impressions they leave on others during online interactions.

Communicating personality

To understand the characteristics that define the communication of personality on social media platforms, it first becomes necessary to understand how people attempt to control impressions others form in direct, synchronous communication. During these common face-to-face interactions, there are two types of signals that communicate an individual's personality, direct and indirect cues (Goffman, 1973). Direct expressions are planned and symbolic, while indirect expressions are unplanned and cannot be influenced (Goffman, 1973). Direct, face-to-face communication between two people incorporates both verbal and nonverbal communication; sense-making during these instances occurs on the basis of verbal cues, i.e. what the other person says, but it also allows an interpretation of the deeper meaning behind these cues based on body language, facial expressions, or paralinguistic characteristics, the indirect cues. During face-to-face interactions, impressions other people get of a personality can only be partially influenced because they are highly dependent on the other's subjective interpretation of what they see and hear. This difficulty of controlling impressions is supported by a study conducted by Bar, Neta, and Linz (2006). When exposing participants to images of different faces and asking for assessment of likeability, the researchers found that impressions of a person

are formed within milliseconds of exposure and that the cognitive processes involved in forming them work quickly.

Despite this limited influence, an individual wants to, “present himself in a light that is favorable” (Goffman, 1973, p. 7) and will manipulate expressions to ensure others create a positive impression. Goffman (1973) compares this grooming of self-presentation to a performance and labels the performance of the self that is put on for others as the front. He further identifies the fragments that come together to create this front as, “expressive equipment” (Goffman, 1973, p. 22) which an individual standardizes to employ during interactions.

Whatever equipment is seen as beneficial for creating the desired impression becomes a tool and is integrated as a part of the standardized front. According to Goffman (1973), parts of the front include aspects of verbal communication, such as posture, speech pattern, and facial expressions, but is also influenced by a person’s nonverbal communication characteristics, such as gender identification, age, or clothing. While some of these tools are stable, such as age or gender identification, others are adjusted depending on the communication situation. While an individual strives to express their gender consistently, speech pattern, for instance, may vary from colloquial in an interaction with a friend to formal during a job interview. Although these tools are certainly present on social media platforms, the way in which individuals attempt to control impressions changes significantly. In these face-to-face exchanges, verbal and nonverbal communication cues are used strategically to communicate the front; however, the online accessibility to these cues is limited. Thus, communicating personality on social media platforms requires individuals to adapt their expressive equipment.

Controlling impressions on social media. The carefully constructed front that presents the ideal self to the outside world changes in the environment of social media. The asynchronous

nature of an online environment plays an important role in the communication between individuals and allows for a different construction of the front. One element that changes in this environment and influences the construction of the front is social distance, a concept that shows to what extent people interact with people outside their social categories or norms. These norms entail factors like age, gender, education, or level of income. Social distance then, for instance, investigates how different generations and age ranges interact with each other. For instance, Smith, McPherson, and Smith-Lovin (2014) investigated how the interaction between people of different sex, race, age, and educational levels changed in the US. They found that people tend to interact the closest with people who share their sociodemographic characteristics (Smith, et al., 2014). Due to the diverse and easily accessible nature of social media platforms, social distance can change because it allows the construction of an environment that solely exposes its creator to interactions that are barely socially distanced, i.e. to people who are very similar. Conversely, a user can also choose to be exposed to diversity, having easy access to people and information outside of their social group.

This unique form of social distance that users experience on social media platforms reduces the chance of losing the carefully constructed self-presentation or front (McEwan & Sobre-Denton, 2011). In this environment, interactions with others are purposeful and are limited to asynchronous communication, such as comments, likes, or messaging, and thus leave users with more superficial connections. These connections finally introduce a greater perceived social distance between users (McEwan & Sobre-Denton, 2011) and reduce the threat of potentially negative impressions or of losing the carefully constructed online front because interactions with all other users can be controlled. Since users of social media platforms can control and limit the cues other users perceive as a display of personality in their profiles, the threat of potentially

negative impressions is minimized. With this social distance between individuals, a user is able to explicitly control the cues that the other perceives as part of the personality (Siibak, 2009). For instance, users may employ visual cues to manage the impressions others get from viewing their profile. Selective presentation of images, editing, and carefully scripted captions can be used to create the front, the external representation of what the user wants others to perceive as their identity.

Creating a digital personality. On social media platforms the principles of direct, face-to-face interactions are taken away and replaced by the asynchronous nature of the virtual environment. Thus, the way people create their front to perform their idealized self in interactions also changes. In place of regular interactions, users on social media platforms create a profile comparable to a digital personality, to communicate their selves and to achieve positive impressions with others. The digital personality becomes the now visual front that is groomed to achieve intended impressions. Within the bounds of the chosen social media platform, users thus strive to, “create an image that is consistent with [their] personal identity” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 62). Just as with face-to-face communication, this striving is motivated by the need to create a favorable image of the self or an ideal thereof.

Due to the disembodied nature of interactions on social media platforms, the creation of the digital personality employs a different set of characteristics than is commonly utilized in traditional face-to-face interactions (Papacharissi, 2002; Zhao, Grasmuck, & Martin, 2008). Tanis and Postmes (2003), for instance, have found that even, “a few biographical details or a portrait picture have a drastic impact on the quality of impressions that people form of one another” (p. 690). Because communication on social media platforms is asynchronous, users have more strategic leeway to influence the impressions they leave on others. Zhao et al. (2008)

argue that users of social media platforms utilize different modes of identity construction to create these impressions, ranging from visual to verbal techniques. In their study on self-representation on Facebook, the researchers identified a continuum of implicit, i.e. visual, to explicit, i.e. narrative, identity strategies (Zhao et al., 2008). The textual entries are often reduced in the communication of information and often, “have a playful tone of ‘wouldn’t you like to know’” (Zhao et al., 2008, p. 1826) to attract interest and control revelation of personal information. On the other side of the continuum, the visual self is presented through images which constitute a more indirect form of conveying cues that are, “aimed at generating desired impressions on their viewers” (Zhao et al., 2008, p. 1825). Mehdizadeh’s (2010) research on online self-representation of college students lends support to this argument. The researcher analyzed elements of personal Facebook pages to find the methods and elements users employ to promote themselves (Mehdizadeh, 2010). Findings in this research confirm that users choose to display flattering images of themselves and use the textual cues to promote a beneficial front (Mehdizadeh, 2010).

To strategically control impressions, individuals make calculated decisions as to which parts of their identity they may reveal to the virtual world (Pearson, 2009). As part of this decision, content such as hyperlinks, texts, and especially images are considered for the presentation of the self (Kapidzic & Herring, 2011). What is displayed to the public is chosen because it is seen as stressing beneficial characteristics, while the aspects of the self that are viewed as flawed are kept hidden (Mendelson & Papacharissi, 2010). The virtual environment of social media platforms allows for a meticulous selection of what is presented to other users and thus gives more control over “self-presentational behavior” (Krämer & Winter, 2008, p. 107). On a social media platform, expressing the self is mediated through the posting and compiling of

images that aid in the creation of favorable expressions. The need to control self-presentation becomes apparent through the creation of a profile and the selective posting of images that support a certain desired self-presentation (Manago, Graham, Greenfield, & Salimkhan, 2008; Toma & Hancock, 2010). While visions of the ideal environment, body, or life are usually bound within the imagination of individuals, social media provides a platform to generate a broadly shared, normed understanding of desirability. Once a specific type of look, place, or activity becomes broadly shared and adopted by a large number of users on social media platforms, a sense of desirability is created (Zhang, Zao, & Xu, 2015). For instance, seeing the positive feedback, i.e. likes and comments, that others receive for wearing a certain type of shoe makes this shoe desirable to the viewer – wearing the shoes is now linked to being socially accepted. This concept is then translated into the creation of the digital profile through which individuals attempt to gain the highest level of social acceptance through presenting a specific type of front. Users take the broadly desired parts that they feel are beneficial in constructing their digital personality and adopt it for their own front. This, for instance, can take the form of using a specifying editing method that generates a lot of likes on social media platforms and using it as well to potentially receive the same type of positive acknowledgement. One social media platform that specifically focuses on the aesthetics of images is Instagram.

Focusing on the visual impression – Instagram’s impact on the digital personality

Launched October 6, 2010 (Instagram, 2017), Instagram has quickly grown to become one of the most popular social media platforms worldwide. More than 700 million consumers are utilizing the location-based mobile application to post snapshots of whatever they find aids in creating their digital personality (Instagram, 2017). Contrary to other social media platforms, such as Facebook, Snapchat, or LinkedIn, Instagram’s main features enables its users to connect

with others based on visual cues, through the sharing of pictures. This allows users to create their identity based on images and to share their lives through the lens of their cameras. This focus on implicit cues opens unique opportunities for the creation of a digital personality. As typical with social media platforms, people represent themselves through a constructed front and, as discussed previously, aim to construct a version of themselves that leaves good impressions.

On Instagram, users may post pictures of themselves, their daily lives, activities, and even their meals, to construct this visually based digital personality. Due to the wide range of Instagram users and their demographics, the variety of images flooding the platform daily is highly diverse: over 80% of Instagram users are living outside of the US (Instagram Blog, 2016). According to the PEW research center, 32% of online adults report having an Instagram account (Greenwood, Perrin, & Duggan, 2016, p. 5). Categorized by gender, this translates to 32% of adult women and 23% of adult men in the U.S., with a fairly even distribution among race and income levels (Pew Research Center, 2017). Furthermore, 59% of adult Instagram users are between the age of 18 to 29 years old (Greenwood, et al., 2016, p. 5).

While some users focus on sharing random snapshots of their daily life, others organize their postings according to themes. Although posts may focus on topics such as food, pets, landscapes, or general lifestyle across different profiles, Hu, Manikonda, & Kambhampati (2014) categorized a sample of images to find that 46.6% of posts on Instagram showed faces, i.e. one person or more, with a slight tendency towards selfies. Posting images of people consequently increases the chance for likes by 38% and the likelihood to receive comments from followers by 32% (Bakhshi, Shamma, & Gilbert, 2014, p. 971). Generally, positive reactions by others can be understood as the ultimate goal for Instagram users – likes, shares and comments show appreciation for a post and thus nonverbally communicate validation from others in the online

environment. What is validated here is the strategically constructed front that a user creates, their digital personality. By receiving positive feedback from others, Instagram users feel validated in the ways they choose to present themselves.

Creating an image-based digital personality. In the creation of the digital personality on Instagram, overall aesthetics of a profile and the theme of images become an important factor of determining the number of followers. It can further be argued that profiles that are dedicated to certain topics and focus on one type of storytelling generate more followers and thus have a bigger audience (Manovich, 2016). This argument is supported by Instagram's business blog, on which recommendations for generating content on the platform detail the following: "Figure out what story you want to tell, decide on a cohesive look and feel for your account, and post consistently" (Instagram Business, Creating Instagram Content, 2017, para. 1). Ultimately, this suggestion translates into committing to a certain theme which can be found in all posts. People, for instance, might focus on exclusively posting images of their hikes and outdoor adventures and thus may attract people who are interested in outdoor activities as well. It is further recommended to find a certain aesthetic, i.e. a limited number of filters and color schemes, to add this visual aspect to the topical experience of the profile. By posting images that present views into the user's private life in a visually appealing manner and the resulting appreciation from others in the form of likes, shares, and comments will display and reinforce the posters social capital. To ensure the visual appeal, simple but efficient editing techniques can be applied to images and further support this implicit form of identity creation. These filters, "apply different manipulation tools ('filters') to transform the appearance of an image" (Hochman & Schwartz, 2012, p. 6) and ensure a representation that the creator feels will resonate best with their audience. Interestingly, research has found that there is a distinct difference between the

way male and female users represent themselves. While men prefer traditional filters and focus on external information, women prefer a daily journal style that allows communication of more intimate details of their lives (Trammell & Keshelashvili, 2005). Finally, once a picture has been sufficiently edited, a user can add a textual component, the caption. This text can be used to further give the image meaning and enhances the post through the option of inserting hyperlinks, tags, or emojis. Finally, the complete post appears on the user's page and, by Instagram default, becomes publicly visible within the platform unless specified otherwise in the settings.

Validating the self. This form of online social validation has strong psychological effects and can influence users' sense of self-worth (Krishen, Berezan, Agarwal, & Kachroo, 2016). In the online environment, relationships "become a tool to validate the self" (Stefanone, Lackaff, & Rosen, 2011, p. 43) that can be tailored towards grooming self-esteem. When viewers appreciate a post, i.e. an image and/or a textual caption that functions as descriptor, they can "double tap" the image and thus show their liking through a symbolic heart. Additionally, Instagram offers the option of subscribing to a profile through which users add all new images posted in that profile to their personal feed and are thus able to receive updates. This feature demonstrates how the number of followers determines the size of a person's audience on Instagram and communicates a user's social capital, i.e. the more followers a user has, the better connected they are. A higher number of followers also symbolizes a larger audience, as every single follower receives the visual updates of newly posted images.

While Instagram's main focus lies on peer profiles and interactions with friends or acquaintances, celebrities are also viewed frequently (Brown & Tiggemann, 2016). Celebrities choosing to give their fans an insight into their private lives can accumulate tens of millions of subscribers who follow, comment, and like images posted on the accounts. In 2018, the most

popular Instagram profiles are that of singer Selena Gomez who reports 134 million followers (Gomez, 2018) and singer Ariana Grande who has 118 million Instagram users following her (Grande, 2018). Although the use of social media platforms can be a tool to validate what is created as the digital personality, the viewing of others' profiles can also lead to comparisons that can cause fluctuations in a user's self-perception.

Social Comparison. With 95 million images uploaded every day (Aslam, 2017), Instagram exposes its users to a constant influx of material striving to fit culturally aesthetic norms through which posters are attempting to please a broad audience and generate maximum likes. Through the skewed and edited lens of others, viewers may also develop skewed outlooks on the ideal environment, on body image, and potentially even on life. On Instagram, the constantly renewed visual input finally leads to direct or subconscious social comparisons (Aslam, 2017). This form of cognitive self-assessment functions to, "evaluate or to enhance some aspects of the self" (Suls, Martin, & Wheeler, 2002, p. 159). In their study, Fox and Vendemia (2016) confirmed that people have a tendency to compare themselves to others on social media platforms. This, "can influence many outcomes, including a person's self-concept, level of aspiration, and feelings of well-being (i.e., subjective well-being)" (Suls et.al, 2002, p. 159). According to Festinger (1954) this form of sense-making is often conducted within a context that allows comparison to individuals who are minorly divergent from the self. As a form of reference, for instance, adolescents compare their own performance, looks, or ideals to their peers and individuals of the same age and status (Jones, 2001). While peers are most often the source of social comparison, celebrities may function as a form of sense-making in comparison processes as well (Jones, 2001). For instance, by following celebrities on Instagram, users can

see what their idols do, what clothes they wear, or how they look. This visual input is then used as a reference to construct a self-image depending on the outcome of the comparison.

There are two different types of social comparison determining the type of self-evaluation. In situations where the source is perceived to be less fortunate in a certain domain, such as looks or ability, downward social comparison may lead to increase in mood and feelings of self-worth (Bessenoff, 2006). When the source of comparison is perceived to portray features superior to one's own, upward comparison is conducted. The evaluation of a "better-off" other may be used as inspiration and motivation to enhance the self but may also lead to negative outcomes for an individual's self-esteem (Collins, 1996). These negative effects of upward social comparison are especially apparent in relationship to physical appearance, i.e. self-evaluation of the own body against a person who is perceived as more attractive, fit, or overall desirable (Morrison, Kalin, & Morrison, 2004). Such a comparison of physical appearance then aids in the construction of an individual's body image, a psychological construct that, "encompasses one's body-related self-perceptions and self-attitudes, including thoughts, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors" (Cash, 2004, p. 1)

Body Image

A person's body image is, although subjective, influenced by outside references originating from various sources. Research has shown that the construction of an individual's attitude towards outside appearance is both anchored in close personal relationships, i.e. family and friends, as well as impersonal sources, such as images on social media or idolized celebrities, found in daily life (Lev-Ari, Baumgarten-Katz, & Zohar, 2014; Tiggemann & Miller, 2010). Feedback provided by direct sources with whom a person may directly interact and from whom they may receive feedback assist in creating an internal perception of others' assessment and

allow for comparison to the level of content with an individual's body image. Additionally, impersonal sources, which are limited to observation only and thus do not provide feedback, are utilized to conduct comparisons to society's norms of the ideal body. Based on the highly visual nature and its easy accessibility, social media platforms like Instagram provide a major source of reference in the construction of body image.

Tiggemann and McGill (2004) confirmed the effect of social comparison on body image in a study by exposing female participants to different types of images concerned with the body and exploring the effects on body dissatisfaction, the "negative subjective evaluations of one's physical body, such as figure, weight, stomach and hips" (Stice & Shaw, 2002, p. 985). Images in this study were taken from magazine advertisements and depicted both thin, female models in their entirety, and focused on a specific part of the human body, for instance a flat stomach (Tiggemann & McGill, 2004). Results show that the more women compare themselves to either of these images, the more they experience body dissatisfaction (Tiggemann & McGill, 2004). Several other studies take these findings further to show that engaging in activities on social media platforms that include images, i.e. the viewing, liking, or sharing of pictures, can also be linked to increased dissatisfaction with the self (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2015; Kim & Chock, 2015; Manago, Ward, Lemm, Reed, & Seabrook, 2015; Meier & Gray, 2014). Fardouly and Vartanian (2015), for instance, have found that the frequency of Facebook use is related to body dissatisfaction. According to their study, females who spend more time on Facebook are more concerned with their body because they are exposed to more material for comparison (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2015). Manago et al. (2015) lend support to this statement and further broaden this perspective with their study investigating the relationship between Facebook use and body objectification in both male and female college students. In their study, the researchers have

found that both genders are more likely to experience body image concern the more they use Facebook (Manago et.al, 2015). Finally, Tiggemann and Zaccardo (2015) have found that viewing ideal images from Instagram tailored to inspire women to be physically active in fact lead to, “greater negative mood, body dissatisfaction, and lower appearance self-esteem” (p. 65).

Social media and the ideal body. Of the different influential channels putting pressure on perceptions of body image, mass media is viewed as the most pervasive and impactful (Tiggemann & Miller, 2010). When it comes to body image, media provides a vast and constantly renewing means of impersonal sources, i.e. images that allow users to compare themselves to others. Social media as a source of feedback for personal body image is characterized by images chosen with the intent to leave long-lasting impressions that result in appreciation from viewers. Consequently, the publicly represented body image has in the past been constructed around the thin ideal and has represented unrealistic tendencies (Wiseman, Gray, Mosimann, & Ahrens, 1992). Historically, young girls and women, i.e. the feminine, have been taught to assign more importance to outside appearance than boys, i.e. the masculine, and are more prone to conform to socially standardized norms of beauty, i.e. the thin-ideal (Perloff, 2014). In Western societies, these ideals evolve around the presumption that being thin leads to more advantageous impressions with others (Morrison et al., 2004). Further, there is an assumption that individuals conforming to the thin ideal are more successful in life (Evans, 2003). Although this statement is fairly outdated, it is still present in today’s society. The thin ideal portrayed in the media feeds into this assumption and creates an association between thinness and success. While this is only a minor factor in the societal perceptions of the idealized body, its implications are lasting. Although the internalization of the thin ideal and its effects are certainly different for everyone, Harriger, Calogero, Witherington, and Smith (2010) have found

that even 3-year-old to 5-year-old girls clearly show internalization of the thin ideal when choosing a playmate. In their study, the pre-adolescent research subjects assigned stigmatized negative attributes to overweight targets, delineating society's clear preference for the thin female body. With implications present at such an early age, it becomes clear how much influence body image has in today's society. Currently, beauty standards across all online sources of comparison, i.e. different social media platforms, "emphasize the desirability of thinness, and thinness at such a level as to be impossible for most women and girls to achieve by healthy means" (Tiggemann & Miller, 2010, p. 80).

Body image internalization. Edited images and their resulting unrealistic norms can cause internalization of socially accepted ideals – a tendency which leads to viewing personal attributes in comparison to perceived personal vicinity to these norms. Such potential internalization can be accounted for through the fact that images portrayed on social media platforms also display the public's appreciation for certain types of physical appearance. Hence, in this impersonal online environment the number of likes, comments or shares indicate the public's recognition of the beauty ideal. With more time spent on social media, increased body dissatisfaction, striving for thinness, body surveillance, and a tendency for dieting can be observed (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016). Vartanian and Dey (2013) argue that upward social comparison, i.e. comparison to a person whose body is viewed as more desirable than the own body, and body dissatisfaction are mediated by internalization of the thin-ideal.

Further research has found that this internalization of idealized attributes starts in the early teenage years (McCabe, Butler, & Watt, 2007) and is then reinforced through the habitual interaction with social media of various kinds. McCabe et al. (2007) further argue that social media has a distinct impact on early identity construction. Teenagers utilize the information and

cues provided on social media to build a personality that is integrative of features found desirable on social media platforms, i.e. it becomes likely that, “adolescent audiences will adapt and use this information as a tool for understanding of self and others.” (Lloyd, 2002, p. 74). On Instagram, for example, the amount of likes and number of followers is a representation of the user’s popularity; someone with a certain body type who gets positive feedback for their physical appearance may thus embody the socially accepted ideal.

One major feature of early identity construction is the development of the self-concept; since our society teaches young adolescents that appearance is a major feature of evaluation by others, body image and physical appearance become a relevant feature of defining the self (Clay, Vignoles, & Dittmar, 2005). Accordingly, Jones (2001) argues that, “given that appearance is one of the potential routes to acceptance and popularity, social comparison becomes a relevant mechanism for learning about the appearance-related social expectations among peers and for evaluating the self in terms of those standards” (p. 647). If the comparison of the own appearance to this recognized ideal results in finding dissimilarities, viewers often experience dissatisfaction with their own body. Perceiving one’s own body as potentially unacceptable for societal standards can ultimately have detrimental effects on the self. For instance, research shows that, “Internet exposure was associated with internalization of the thin ideal, body surveillance, dieting, and reduced body esteem” (Tiggemann & Slater, 2014, p. 615), which ultimately leaves to body dissatisfaction.

Body dissatisfaction. Although social media platforms, much like print media in the past, allow users to view celebrities and models, it also facilitates comparison with peers (Fardouly, Diedrichs, Vartanian, & Halliwell, 2015). As these sources of comparison are a major influence in the establishment of an individual’s personal body image, viewing them regularly is

related to body dissatisfaction when viewed images are judged more desirable than the own (Brown & Tiggemann, 2016; Kim & Chock, 2015; Manago et al., 2015; Meier & Gray, 2014). Body dissatisfaction can be understood as negative self-evaluation of parts or the entirety of the body. In a study on the effects of peer and celebrity images on female body satisfaction and mood, Brown and Tiggemann (2016) found that both have similar negative impacts. Viewing Instagram images of unknown peers, as well as celebrities who impersonate the thin ideal led to the same levels of body dissatisfaction and decrease in mood (Brown & Tiggemann, 2016). The study further supports previously introduced research on body image and body dissatisfaction on other social networking sites and print media that established the pervasive effects of social comparison (Fardouly et al., 2015).

A variety of research concerned with the impact of mass media on body image further show that exposure to idealized body images in the media have significant effects on viewers' self-perception and dissatisfaction with their physical appearance (Clay et al., 2005; Cusumano, & Thompson, 1997; Engeln-Maddox, 2005; Fardouly, et al., 2015; Kim & Chock, 2015; Tiggemann & Slater, 2014). Kraye, Ingledew, and Iphofen (2007) suggest that, "importance and relevance attached to appearance or internalization of an idealized shape is particularly counterproductive" to body image (p. 894). This statement is further supported in a study by Tiggemann & Zaccardo (2015) in which a sample of female college students was exposed to images of physically toned women with ideal bodies the source of which were various publicly accessible Instagram profiles. Before and after exposure, participants completed a measure of body satisfaction with the results showing a clear decrease after viewing these images. This effect can be accounted for by the very small likelihood that the average woman in the sample can achieve the goals presented in the Instagram images (Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015).

Additionally, while body dissatisfaction is extensively studied in the academia, it is also recognized by the non-academic communities. One way in which people react to the acknowledged negative effects of the idealized body in the mass media is through a phenomenon called the body positivity movement.

The Body Positivity Movement

Despite its negative effect on body image and all connected concerns, social media also has the potential to positively impact identity creation and counter the social pressure to conform with the public's thin ideal. While the visual weight of social media platforms can have detrimental effects on an individual's perception of socio-cultural norms, such as body image and the internalization of thinness as the ideal, "being able to 'like' or 'follow' pages, groups and individual figures means [users] can build an 'identity catalogue' that represents their identity as people" (Royal Society for Public Health, 2017, p. 14). On Instagram, for instance, this catalogue consists of profiles that a person follows that show areas of interest, sources of inspiration, or role models. Despite the constantly present thin ideal, social media platforms allow alternative narratives of body image to emerge. A major opposition to the classic thin ideal can be found in body positivity. While mainly utilized in the field of psychology to counter eating disorders and teach a healthy relationship with the body, body positivity can be defined as, "a complex, multifaceted construct distinct from low levels of negative body image and extending beyond body satisfaction or appearance evaluation" (Webb, Wood-Barcalow, & Tylka, 2015, p. 131). It is important to note that the concept of body positivity is distinctly different from a mere absence of negative perception; it is an overall benevolent approach to personal evaluations of the physical self. Hence, body positivity is further used to, "challenge weight stigma, which presents roadblocks to health, and promote all individuals' accessibility to physical health and

psychological well-being.” (Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015, p. 120). A body positive attitude is constructed on a multitude of levels that evolve around a broad understanding for the concept of beauty and a more amiable approach to self-perception. Wood-Barcalow, Tylka, and Augustus-Horvath (2010) identify four tendencies which aid in the construction of a body positive evaluation: First, respecting the body is accomplished by listening to the body’s needs and by following healthy behaviors. Further, nourishing favorable opinions of the body and actively practicing body acceptance aid in creating body positive behavior (Wood-Barcalow, et al., 2010). As the last point, the researchers identify the tendency to reject, “unrealistic ideal body images portrayed in the media” (Wood-Barcalow, et al., 2010, p. 107).

While the idealized thin body is prominently portrayed in the media, a large number of users on various social media platforms have taken it upon themselves to counter the glorification of thin female bodies. In the case of body positivity, a strong movement can be observed on Instagram. The visual nature of this social media platform lends support to the movement by providing an easily accessible stage for activists and their followers. Instagram allows advocates for this movement to reach a large audience and to promote a more positive attitude towards body image. By promoting such a concept, these advocates provide indirect sources for social comparison that may lead to more body acceptance in other users since they recognize the positive communication within the body positive profiles. Through utilizing hashtags, keywords prefixed with the # character to show belonging to an event, movement, sentiment, etc. (Ma, Sun, & Cong, 2012), pictures are tagged and grouped with similar content. Through this, interested parties can easily locate the body positive community and become a more or less active participant in it. Hashtags are further described as, “a more flexible option to organise and describe objects in order to improve services such as clustering, indexing, searching

and recommendations” (Dawot & Ibrahim, 2014, p. 177). When looking at the overall number of posts tagged with hashtags affiliated with the body positivity movement, #bodypositivity and #effyourbeautystandards are found to be most commonly used in these. The movement has indeed become so popular with Instagram users that profiles solely dedicated to advocating for a positive body image now reach hundreds of thousands of followers. Having access to this online experience and community supports another important factor in the development of a body positive mindset. As feedback from others is a major influence on the construction of the body image, it plays a significant role for a body positive self-concept as well. Perceived acceptance from others can aid in the construction of body acceptance because it communicates that, “body shapes and sizes are generally accepted by important others (e.g. friends, partners, family) and society, which can be communicated directly (e.g., ‘I like your shape’) and indirectly (e.g., by not focusing on or commenting about their bodies)” (Webb et al., 2015, p. 138). Like-minded people and support in high numbers construct the foundation to reject generalized ideals and find justification to do so in others. Social media platforms, such as Instagram, can facilitate this need and provide a medium for communication between like-minded people for support, exchange of messages, and outreach.

It thus becomes of importance to consider how Instagram users construct messages to communicate body positivity to others. Due to the vast extent of constantly changing and updated visual content that reflects users’ idealized self-presentations, Instagram becomes a highly relevant source for research in a vast number of disciplines. In psychology, researchers investigate the motivation for using Instagram (Lee, Lee, Moon, & Sung, 2015) or its connection to narcissistic behavior (Moon, Lee, Lee, Choi, & Sung, 2016; Sheldon & Bryant, 2016). Research in marketing is concerned with the ways in which companies can use Instagram for

promotional purposes (Nunes, Ferreira, de Freitas, & Ramos, 2018, Wally & Koshy, 2014). In the communication discipline, among other things, researchers investigate the unique ways in which individuals communicate through visual imagery (Geurin-Eagleman & Burch, 2016; Highfield & Leaver, 2016). The massive collection of constantly fluctuating images paired with features such as location services and tags grouping pictures with similar content, provide interesting ways to, “visualize, analyze and discover concealed socio-cultural characteristics and trends” (Hochman & Schwartz, 2012, p. 6). In the communication discipline, for instance, profiles can be utilized to explore how users visualize and communicate social and cultural tendencies of this emergent movement, which can provide a better understanding into the structures that allow the changing of established socio-cultural norms.

In the current study, Instagram content is used to further the understanding of how this social media platform is used to change the well-established, idealized body image still present in the media. Despite its rich content and rich visual communication, the body positivity movement has not been the focus of extensive research for the communication discipline until now. No study has yet explored the basic approaches that Instagram users employ to communicate their body positive messages. Further, this research aims at understanding how these messages are understood by the broad audience present on Instagram. Hence, the research questions for this study are as follows.

RQ 1: How are messages constructed in posts concerned with the body positivity movement on Instagram?

RQ 2: How do audiences perceive these constructs?

Methods

To answer the research questions, the investigator chose a qualitative approach consisting of two phases. In phase 1, to gain a detailed insight into Instagram posts concerned with the body positivity movement, images were pulled from various public Instagram accounts following a set number of guidelines. Criteria for inclusion incorporated the image content and the person posting the image. The resulting catalogue of posts was then analyzed to establish a comprehensive understanding of how Instagram users construct messages concerned with body positivity to answer RQ1. To further narrow down the sample of 280 images, network analysis was employed to find representative posts for further investigation. Additionally, in phase 2 the researcher conducted interviews to include the public's perception of messages constructed in body positive posts on Instagram and thus answer RQ2.

Phase I: Content Analysis on Instagram

Data collection. Since Instagram is an openly accessible social media platform, the researcher was able to consider data from profiles that have chosen to allow public access to their images (Moreno, Goni, Moreno, & Diekema, 2013). Instagram's search and explore option was utilized to locate images that were tagged with either #bodypositivity or #effyourbeautystandards, the most commonly used hashtags to signal belonging to the body positivity movement. The result of the searches were posts that used one of the hashtags under consideration and were either liked by a large number of Instagram users or were posted very recently. To collect a sample that is representative of Instagram's demographics and to ensure a wide range of topics within images, five images per hashtag were pulled at set times twice a day for two weeks, 6am and 12pm Alaska time, resulting in a sample of 280 images. This decision was made because empirically the researcher found that during these times a large amount of

new content was uploaded to the platform and because these times covered the morning and later times of the day on multiple continents. The procedure encompassed both the “most popular” section, by default showing the nine posts with the most likes per hashtag, as well as the section that showed the nine images posted most recently respectively. Data was collected as screenshots of the posts and stored in jpeg. format. To qualify for data collection, images had to conform to the following set of guidelines: (1) only images were considered for data collection, videos were not utilized in the sample, (2) images had to show original content, i.e. all pictures had to show the owner of the profile; reposts were not considered, and (3) images showing text, comics, food, or any non-human content were not considered for the sample. All data were consistently named to show date and time of collection, as well as affiliation with either hashtag; the resulting code, for instance, read “10-12-2-12P-4”. After an initial viewing of the 280 posts that were collected, the images and profiles of their creators show that only 9 images were posted by individuals identifying as males, two of whom openly identified as transgender in their posts. 38 posts were created by black Instagram users, 9 posts depicted individuals of Asian heritage, and 7 users were Hispanic.

Categorizing content. The data collected from Instagram was first categorized according to reoccurring themes in the posts. The captions, i.e. textual part of the posts, were analyzed according to Owen (1984); hence, categories were established based on their recurrence and forcefulness, repeatedly surfacing throughout the sample. The visual aspect of the post, i.e. the image, was utilized as an addition to the caption and as reinforcement of the established categories. After an initial viewing of all 280 images, the researcher established 9 general categories illustrated in the sample; all of these were identified as both visual and textual topics within a post. For the purpose of this study, a category can be understood as the outcome of the

first level of analysis. This level of analysis was conducted to find the most occurring general topics of discussion and to organize the content. For instance, an image detailing a person wearing a certain outfit and discussing their clothing brand of choice was included in the “fashion” category. When analyzing the images, it became clear that these categories are often closely connected and that most posts address a number of different topics, thus linking them to various categories. To gage a better overview of images’ categorical belonging, the researcher constructed a basic excel table to include each post’s code and its thematic belonging to one or more categories. The categories noted in this table are defined as follows:

1. Fashion. Individuals discuss their clothing or outfit. Captions may include brand names, fashion tips for followers, or feeling associated with wearing a certain set of clothes.
2. Daily life. Captions and images center on posters’ daily lives and address activities, life events or other situations. This category is general and might not include any mention of body positivity besides the associated hashtags.
3. Body positivity movement is directly addressed. Captions explicitly discuss the body positivity movement and related topics (events, opinions, etc.). Hashtags further detail the association with the movement.
4. Disability. Individuals have a mental or physical disability. Posts are linked to the movement either explicitly or through hashtags.
5. Sexualized. Individuals portray suggestive posing or expose a large amount of skin. Captions may be suggestive or meant to be teasing / flirty.
6. Mental health. Images and captions are dedicated to / address overcoming struggles and disorders. Posts might be sharing personal stories and information and / or encourage the

viewers to stay motivated to fight their own battles. Posts centering around this category are linked to the ongoing challenges individuals face while dealing with their illness.

7. **Fitness.** Posts show and discuss physical activity and associated topics. Both physical and mental benefits of working out are addressed.
8. **Weight.** Posts in this category may discuss any form of weight change and associated topics. This category may also address obesity in either a positive or negative way.
9. **Pride.** Pride may be linked to any of the above categories. Captions talk about pride either implicitly or explicitly in connections to other categories.

To gain a better understanding of the interactions and links between the different categories in posts in the sample, the researcher decided to employ a simplified version of social network analysis.

Social network analysis. As Hansen, Shneiderman and Smith (2011) state, “network analysis provides powerful ways to summarize networks and identify key people or other objects that occupy strategic locations and positions within the matrix of links” (p. 5). In the context of this study, the social network analysis provided an overview of the most important categories and the key connections between them. Hansen et al. (2011) also argue that the analytic possibilities obtained by displaying networks assist researchers in understanding the relationship between large amounts of interactive data (Hansen et al., 2011). As the amount of data for this research was quite vast, social network analysis provided a way to understanding the basic characteristics of the sample and to find a smaller, representative sample for a more detailed analysis. For the purpose of this study, Ucinet was chosen to create the network (Borgatti, Everett, & Freeman, 2002). This software package is a tool which allows researchers, “to

characterize whole networks and positions of nodes within networks” (Borgatti, Everett, & Freeman, 2014, para. 1).

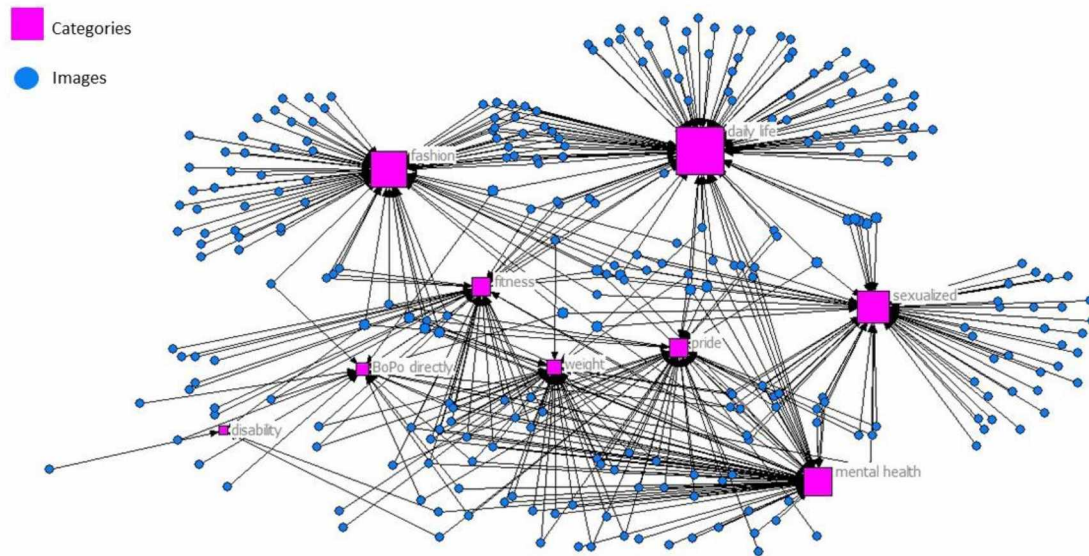


Figure 1. The basic network created with Ucinet.

Using the previously constructed basic excel table, the researcher created a 2-mode network as shown in Figure 1, a type of network detailing the relationship between two kinds of entities or nodes (Borgatti & Everett, 1997). The entities under consideration here are (1) the images in the sample, and (2) the categories into which all images were sorted. Hence, this network shows to what extent images are connected to the individual categories. For instance, if an image was identified as belonging to the categories “mental health” and “fitness,” its blue dot would connect to both categories’ pink squares with arrows (see Figure 1). Further, the importance of each category in the network, also called betweenness centrality, is shown in the size of the pink nodes: The more images, i.e. blue circles, are connected to a category, i.e. pink square, the more central this category becomes in the network (Hansen et al., 2011). It becomes clear from the network, that three of the largest categories, daily life, fashion, and sexualized, receive their high

levels of betweenness centrality though a vast number of outliers, nodes that are connected to only a single category. Based on the high number of outliers in this network, a closer investigation of the images that constitute these nodes will be beneficial in answering Research Question 1: *How are messages constructed by the body positivity movement on Instagram?*

Moreover, to further understand the structure of the remaining posts in the sample and their connection to the categories, the researcher created three additional networks, each detailing the same network under consideration but showing a new layer. In the following depictions of the network, the display of degree centrality for the categories was adjusted to portray the different levels of connectedness in nodes. Degree centrality describes the amount of connections a node has. In this network, degree centrality details to how many categories a post is connected as seen in Figures 2,3, and 4.

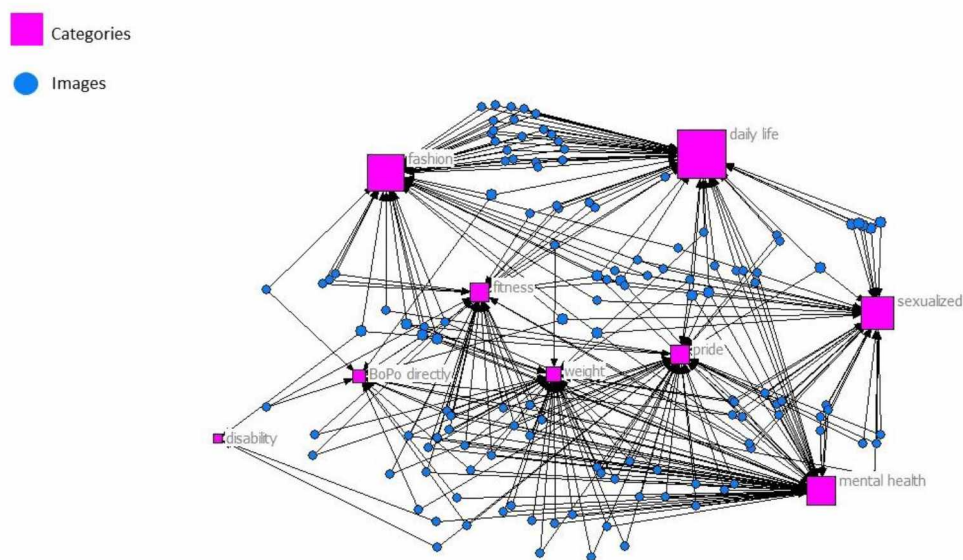


Figure 2. The network after all first-degree ties were removed.

When removing all posts that have first-degree ties, i.e. that are only connected to one theme, the respective nodes disappear and only nodes remain that are linked to two or more

categories. It becomes apparent that a number of two-degree nodes are linked to two central categories. Thus, daily life, fashion, and sexualized do not only retain their centrality through one-degree ties, but also because people post a large number of images that address a connection of these topics. This trend is relevant to note as it points to the need for a more detailed analysis of images to understand the approach to constructing messages that connect two seemingly polarized topics, such as mental health and sexuality. Additionally, less central categories become more visual in their connections, which is further detailed in Figures 3 and 4 that further remove ties.

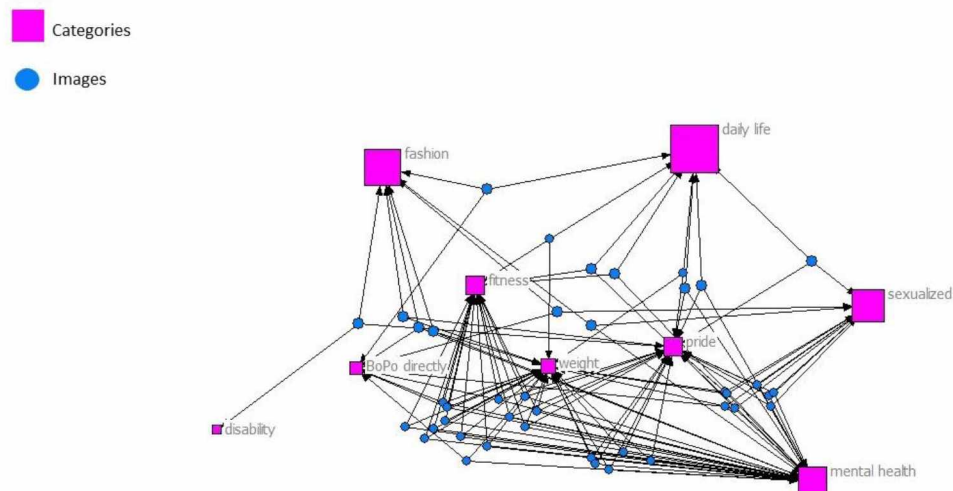


Figure 3. The network showing all nodes with three or more connections.

In Figure 3, all nodes that are linked to three or more categories remain. While nodes still involve the categories with high betweenness centrality, such as daily life or fashion, it also becomes clear that smaller categories are relevant for third degree ties. The more topics a post addresses, the more likely it is that it involves one of the less frequently used categories. A major hub for this level of degree centrality is the mental health category. It becomes apparent that users create images and captions centered on mental health solely in connection to other topics,

such as fitness, weight, or pride. None of the images in the sample are exclusively discussing mental health, but always connect it to another topic.

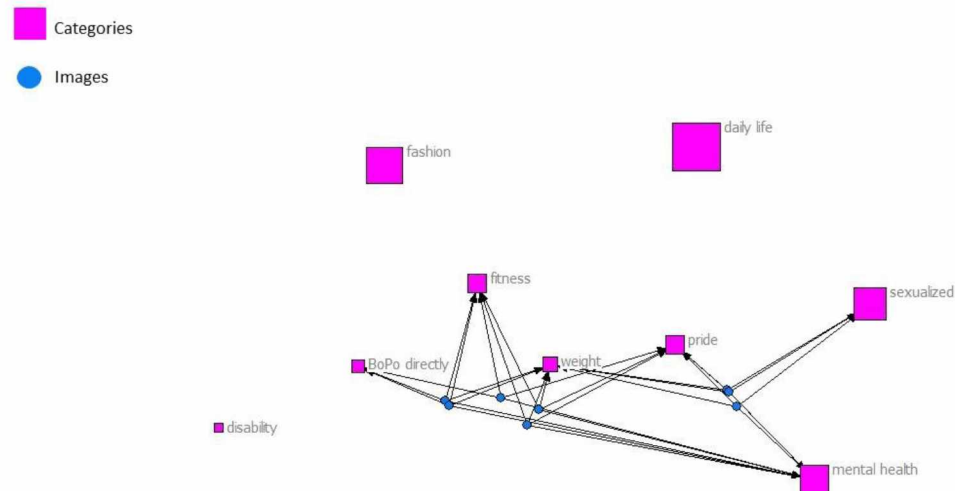


Figure 4. The network only showing nodes linked to four categories.

Finally, Figure 4 solely displays nodes with fourth-degree ties, i.e. images that are connected to four categories. Here, only eight nodes remain in this version of the network and it becomes notable that the maximum number of connections of an image in this network is four. Based on the findings of this basic network analysis, the researcher chose a number of images from the sample to be representative of its categorical construction. These images represent the variety of connections and include both pendants as well as nodes with all levels of degree centrality apparent in the sample. This approach was taken to ensure that a wide spread of topics and discussions are covered and that the notable connections identified in the four networks are covered and sufficiently discussed.

Content analysis. Based on the different levels of centrality in the sample, 55 images were chosen to create a comprehensive representation of the previous findings for further close

analysis and to answer Research Question 1: How are messages constructed in posts concerned with the body positivity movement on Instagram? As this research question is concerned with the actual content of the images and captions in the sample, the network analysis provided a good method of finding an appropriate smaller sample for analysis. The images of this smaller sample were selected to cover the full range of centrality as seen in the network and to provide a comprehensive scope of the previously established categories and their combinations. First, the 8 posts that were found to belong to 4 categories were included in the smaller sample. The number 8 was determined as the number of images to be collected for all other levels of centrality. Accordingly, 8 images each were selected at random from the group of posts that belonged to either one of the categories fashion, daily life, and sexualize exclusively. This approach was then repeated for posts connecting to two and three categories as well, to generate 16 more images to be included in the sample. All posts were drawn at random to avoid bias. During analysis of the posts, it became clear that the representative sample was not sufficiently saturated and required a higher density of more complex images, i.e. posts linked to three categories, to confirm findings. Thus, 7 more posts were randomly chosen to create the final sample size of 55 images. Further, the representative sample was analyzed for messages in three relevant factors that provide an insight into the different parts of an Instagram post: (1) The content of the caption, (2) the wording of the post, and (3) the grammatical construction of the post. Themes within the construction thereof were identified according to the method suggested by Owen (1984), identifying recurrence, repetition, and forcefulness of themes in the images. Within these three factors of content analysis, a reoccurrence of discussions centered on trials and struggle that were juxtaposed against a theme of journeying through.

Phase II: Conducting Interviews

Sample and recruitment. Interviews were conducted to answer Research Question 2: *How do audiences perceive these constructs?* Potential participants for interviews were recruited among affiliates of a mid-sized university utilizing a number of recruitment methods. First, flyers were displayed in highly trafficked areas throughout buildings on campus. Potential participants were then able to collect a pull-off tab which provided information to contact the researcher via email. When contacted, the researcher responded with a scripted email to set up an interview at a time convenient for the participant. The email thanked participants for their interest and provided them with potential appointment slots from which they could choose a convenient time for an interview. After a completed interview, participants were also asked to assist in snowball sampling by promoting the study with potentially interested peers. As another method of recruitment, the researcher approached instructors of communication classes to receive permission to solicit participation through presentations in their classrooms. After collecting email addresses from interested individuals, the investigator contacted potential participants to set up interviews. To be included in the study, students had to be at least 18 years of age and be a member of the university at which the research was conducted. Over a period of eight weeks, 15 individuals were recruited as participants.¹

Setup. For scheduled interviews, the researcher met with participants in a convenient location on campus. While easily accessible and situated in a popular area, the rooms for interviews were chosen based on their potential to provide a safe and moderately private environment. As the interview process asked participants to discuss personal experiences with

¹ Individuals chose to leave comments on the flyers for the study, expressing their opinion on the body positivity movement. If the reader is interested, pictures of these flyers can be found as attachment to this thesis (see Appendix A).

body image, this level of privacy promoted a safer atmosphere and increased the likelihood of participants feeling sufficiently comfortable to discuss potentially impactful details of their views on body image, an intimate self-concept.

Interview protocol. A total of 15 interviews were conducted over a time period of 7 weeks. All interview participants remained anonymous and, for the purpose of the study, were assigned a randomized number. After giving informed consent, the participant first completed a demographic survey through the survey tool Qualtrics. This survey assessed both general information, such as age, gender identification, sexuality, and relationship status, as well as for a more specific assessment of their social media use. After completion of the survey and obtaining permission from the participant, the researcher started an audio recording and commenced the interview. This process was divided into two parts (see Appendix B for the interview protocol). Interviews ranged from 9 minutes to 31 minutes.

Part 1 – Establishing a concept of body positivity. First, the researcher asked participants for their personal experience with body image and their understanding of body positivity. The decision was made to incorporate these questions to investigate whether a shared concept of body positivity exists among research subjects. A shared concept ensures higher consistency among participant's replies since their basis for consideration is similar. Additionally, this first part of the interview allowed participants to become aware of their own conceptualization of body positivity and to provide them with an easy entry into a topic that is not usually addressed as directly as in this study. Among others, questions in this first part were, "How do you define a healthy body", "What experience do you have with body image", and "What is body positivity to you" (see Appendix B). This first half functioned to gain an insight into the general attitudes and personal encounters that participants previously had with body positivity and to create a level of

comfort with the interviewer to help facilitate sharing personal experiences before entering the second part of the interview.

Part 2 – Catalogue Manipulation. For the second half, the participants were asked to assess ten Instagram posts and their captions according to their liking. The researcher purposely chose these ten images to construct a sample that is representative of the finding of the previously conducted content analysis (see Appendix D). Concerning demographics, the ten images cover gender, ethnicity, and ability. The images further cover the range of categories that were established during the content analysis. Participants were then encouraged to take sufficient time ranking all images according to their intuitive personal preference and to order them according to their personal like or dislike. Since the participants' knowledge and experience of body positivity was triggered through the first half of the interview protocol, the images' content was clearly identifiable and was linked to this movement by all interviewees. After a participant had finished, the researcher commenced asking questions about the assessment process. First, the question, "Tell me about the ones you liked / didn't like. What are the reasons for that" encouraged detailed descriptions of the decision-making process involved with categorizing the posts and gave an insight into participants' preferences. After also assessing the emotional effect of the sample, asking the question "How did these images affect you?", the participants were then asked the following questions constructed to assess their understanding of the message construction and purpose of the posts: "Why do you think they post these images", "What is most outstanding in these images", and, "What do you think is the message behind these images". Finally, after participants answered the question, "What would you like to add to this interview", the researcher thanked the participants for their contribution and ended the audio recording.

Data analysis. The researcher transcribed all audio recordings of the interviews to answer Research Question 2: *How do audiences perceive these constructs?* Additionally, the documented scripts for each interview were analyzed to identify reoccurring themes according to the framework provided by Owen (1984) to establish characteristics found in the second part of the interview, the catalogue manipulation. Themes were established according to recurrence, forcefulness, and repetition, while representative quotes were used to reinforce the findings. For part 1, the establishment of a concept of body positivity left clear implications of a shared understanding of the concept between all participants. In an analysis of part 2, the catalogue manipulation, three themes emerged: (1) Instant gratification needed, showing the identified goal of posting body positive messages on Instagram, (2) inspiration provided, centering on the understanding of these messages, and (3) positivity wanted, detailing the participants' requirement of a positive connotation within a post.

Results and Discussion

Body Positive Messages on Instagram

RQ1: *How are messages constructed in posts concerned with the body positivity movement on Instagram?* To answer this RQ1, the researcher identified shared characteristics within all images in the sample that show how body positive messages are typically constructed. The messages created within the body positivity movement on Instagram portray a number of common characteristics allowing insight into this emergent phenomenon. As can be expected from a visually based platform, the level of depth within the context of constructing messages varies widely but needs to be considered as a two-fold approach for all levels of complexity. Typical for Instagram, there are both image as well as a potential caption that, together, form the message intended by the poster.

Content. First, the content of the message establishes the general concern of the Instagram post itself and can mainly be located in the caption that is posted along with the image. This textual part of an Instagram post is an indicator for the creator's logic in posting the image and can function as an additional source of information and explanation of the post. In the sample, the most prevalent reasons or areas of discussion for people posting images concerned with the body positivity movement are the following: (a) Stories or anecdotes reveal some level of insight into the creator's private life or thought process, (b) inspirational captions and motivational texts provide a justification for posting images, while (c) non-specified captions that are not explicitly aimed at this movement are added to some posts.

Interestingly, the posts concerned with the body positivity movement range from this absolute focus on the image with barely any textual addition to posts that offer extensive, multi-paragraph captions along with an image. Looking at the less complex combinations of text and image, it becomes apparent that posters use Instagram as a platform to share their pictures with

followers and the general public, but that they are not necessarily directly concerned with the body positivity movement. These posts belong to what was identified as first-degree ties in the network analysis, i.e. they are images which are concerned with insights into the daily lives of posters or their fashion sense, giving statements such as, “Disney Date with my cousin” (Nicole, 2017) or, “I had to wear this beautiful new brooch today and paired it with my storybook dress” (manicpixie665, 2017). For images that are solely concerned with a single, more superficial topic, such as the ones under consideration here, the grammatical context and wording do not require an in-depth analysis.

Additionally, captions for these posts portray a short, commentary style choice of words and grammatical structure, such as can often be found in text messages. Individuals appear to leave a short comment along with their image because the caption is an option when posting on Instagram. The messages constructed for this type of post are more generalized and the captions merely function as an addition to the actual image. For instance, while one image shows the individual casually leaning against a wall, the caption reads, “Basically my everyday look: something cropped with jeans. Easy peezy... Currently obsessed with these distressed jeans from Forver21. Link in biooooo” (Simone, 2017).

Posts that are more openly concerned with the body positivity movement tend to directly address topics that fall under this label and are characterized by more extensive captions. In these more explicitly body positive posts, the actual image often functions as a mere anchor for the story told and almost exclusively depict women posing in a manner that participants identified as confidence during the interviews. When analyzing the captions, it becomes obvious that addressing body positivity is almost exclusively done through the introduction of personal stories. The content of these posts show themes of personal trials and struggle, but also convey a

matter of journeying through them. This theme of journeying mostly takes form in discussions of mental health and recovery from negative body image. A poster who calls herself “bodyposipanda” tells her followers an anecdote about the superficial happiness she would feel when someone called her thin (Crabbe, 2017). She then, however, details how this happiness quickly turned into panic because, “there was always more weight to lose” (Crabbe, 2017). With this caption, she posts a picture of her past, thin self in comparison to a picture of her current self, having gained weight and openly laughing. Another woman posts a revealing picture of her torso with a caption that explains her weight gain due to a medical condition and the mental issues she experienced as a result of it (Appendix C, Figure C-6). However, she gives her post a positive connotation in the last sentence, “I still have a long way to go on my journey of #selflove and #Bodypositivity but I wanted to share how I feel after receiving a few messages from others who are struggling” (Divine, 2017).

The act of sharing something personal is a natural part of social media, however, users concerned with the body positivity movement take their stories and add an additional layer to it. The theme of journeying through their struggles is tied into a motif of inspiration and motivation for viewers that is clearly addressed as call to action. One user, for instance, starts her caption with, “Too many times I spent in oversized t-shirts, hiding my thighs with board shorts & dragging out the process of getting changed after swimming class at school” (iamdaniadriana, 2017), but ends this obviously personal story with the following inspirational statement: “Don’t wait a minute longer to embrace your body and embrace summer” (iamdaniadriana, 2017). She thus takes her own experiences and uses them to construct a message targeted at empowering viewers. Another poster provides this intended motivation explicitly by stating, “Believing in myself lead me to a path of wellness, health, body positivity, self love, self care, and to so many

amazing opportunities and new friends. Take that step this second and learn to believe in YOU and just watch the magic happen!!” (fittybritttty, 2017).

The intentional motivation and sharing of personal information that the creators of these posts choose to present to followers as a part of their front leave interesting implications for the construction of the front and their manner of self-presentation. The assumption that the digital personality a user on Instagram creates depicts an idealized version of themselves in order to leave the best possible impression with viewers of the profile here takes on an unusual form. It appears that the promotion of self-acceptance and self-love that defines the body positivity movement requires a different set of tools to construct the front. Here, the expressive equipment employed to construct the digital self communicates a raw, unfiltered front to their user’s followers. Aspects that have to meet the socially accepted requirement for aesthetic presentation, for instance a thin figure, to gain validation from followers are here purposely left out.

Oftentimes, the poster even addresses the absence of normed aesthetic standards in their images and receive appreciation in this way. Further, the revelation of personal stories and struggles towards finding a way to a positive body image lend support to the communication of an unfiltered and honest, “real” digital personality. This form of self-presentation leaves the implication that social comparison in this case leads to a more positive outcome for the viewer. Since the posts focus on honest and personal communication, the tendency to engage in social comparison evident on social media platforms is turned into potential identification with the poster. Instead of finding a social media user posting a perfectly created front conforming with the normed ideals of aesthetics, the viewer finds himself / herself / themselves exposed to stories, anecdotes and personal revelations with which they can identify.

While the contents of the captions are to be understood as the main factor to understand the message construction of body positive messages on Instagram, it is also relevant to further detail the verbal and grammatical tools users employ to create these messages.

Wording. When analyzing these posts, it becomes obvious that the manner in which captions are constructed verbally further aid in the creation of the honest and approachable front. The wording of captions in the sample is centered on describing (a) the difficulties and obstacles the poster has to overcome and (b) the ongoing journey with body positivity, while (c) also maintaining a generally benevolent choice of words that is centered on positivity and avoids insults or degrading descriptions. For instance, while a poster describes other people's negativity towards her, her statement does not reflect this negativity, "There will always be those that oppose you. Those that look up at you and try to knock you down a peg or two" (Roxx, 2017). The poster does, in fact, go on to state, "Just remember, in those times of adversity, who you are. You are worthy. Own who you are! Be Bold- Be Shameless" (Roxx, 2017).

While people choose a fairly colloquial style to construct their messages, posts are worded in a way that also mirrors the ongoing struggle they are addressing. A number of messages, for instance, are introduced by admittance of insecurities: "It's taking a lot of courage to post this..." and, "wasn't sure about posting this image... I'm still a bit hesitant" show how individuals choose their wording to create identification with their viewers on a level of content by introducing personal difficulty. Here, again, the digital personality is created to be personable and honest, admitting to feelings that are commonly shared among the creator and their viewers. Such an approach is further supported by the common choice of words that can be grouped within the context of body positivity. Terms that are used for this range from simple vocabulary centered around mental health (self-care, recovery, etc.) and confidence (courage, worthy,

embrace, etc.) to full constructs, such as, “body appreciation game” and, “body shaming addiction”. This quite telling vocabulary further aids in the construction of the messages in these posts and shows the benevolent context in which they are communicated. This approach to message construction further aids in the communication of a personable front that suggest identification rather than inspires social comparison.

Grammar. The captions which are accompanying the images in an Instagram post lead to the third factor prevalent in the textual message construction, the grammatical approach chosen by posters. In this section, three main themes become important. (a) The use of personal pronouns shows a focus on the personal aspect of the captions, displaying frequent use of I, me, and myself, (b) the use of grammatical tenses underlines a theme of journeying. Finally, (c) the implementation of hypermedia, i.e. tags and hashtags, as well as the use of emojis, allows an interactive component characteristic for social media platforms (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Here, the most striking feature of the messages again ties into the creation of the digital personality and the seemingly honest, approachable interaction with the viewers. One way this is achieved is through the use of personal pronouns. First, posters directly communicate with their audience and dedicate parts of their caption to statements such as, “You have to make choices in life. With every choice, you say ‘yes’ to something and ‘no’ to something else” (Frey, 2017). Second, to portray the individual’s revelations, the majority of posts utilize the pronouns “I / me / myself / mine” as an integral part of the posts. Captions such as, “I have what I have and I am happy. I’ve lost what I’ve lost and I am still happy” clearly introduce the poster’s perspective and underline the intimate nature of sharing this post with the viewers (Quinn, 2017). In this case, the young woman posting refers to her physical disability. In the same post, she

simultaneously facilitates engagement at the very end of the caption by stating, “Double tap if you’re with me” (Quinn, 2017).

Additionally, the formerly introduced theme of journeying towards more body positivity can be observed in the use of grammatical tenses within posts. The general introduction of personal background frequently incorporates past tense, utilizing phrases like, “I was in similar out-of-shape place when I was skinny too” (lexiemanion, 2017). This changes to present tense as the creators continue to tell their stories that typically conclude with their current, more positive state of mind. For example, after stating she was out of shape before and continuing to inform viewers about her physical and mental struggles, this person then goes on to state, “I’ve got to work hard still in so many aspects in my life. And there will always be things beyond my control in life. However, if I can continue choosing to help myself, reaching out for help, and listening to what my mind and body need, I think it’s just another step in the right direction” (lexiemanion, 2017). This shows how grammatical tenses further the impression of the user’s continuing journey towards more self-love that she shares with everyone who is potentially interested. To gauge this interest and the perception that the audience gets from posts such as this one, the researcher analyzed the interviews conducted for the current study.

Audience Perceptions

To answer RQ2: *How do audiences perceive these constructs?* the researcher further analyzed the answers given by participants in both parts of the interview process to establish universally shared topics of discussion among all interviewees. This aspect of the current study is relevant to consider for the analysis of message construction to confirm the findings of the content analysis. While assumptions of the messages can be validated by theory, the actual perception of the public required a larger assessment from a diverse group of people. According

to the Qualtrics survey, 80% of the 15 participants identified as female, three of which reported to be older than 40 years of age. The majority of participants, including the three individuals who identified as male, report to be between 18 and 25 years old. 93.33% of participants further claim to use a wide variety of social media platforms multiple times a day, while the remaining 6.67% identify their social media use as “once a day”. This frequent access is also reflected in the distribution of platforms that participants identified as important: Youtube constitutes the most accessed social media platform with 20% of interviewees accessing it, closely followed by Pinterest (18.46%) and Facebook (18.46%). Both Instagram (16.92%) and Snapchat (16.92%) were also chosen.

A shared understanding of body positivity. The first part of the interview, the investigation of a common, shared understanding and definition of body positivity, showed clear conformities in participants’ understanding of body image and body positivity. Establishing these concepts prior to a close analysis of this audience’s attitudes towards the message construction of Instagram posts within the body positivity movement revealed that a shared understanding for the concept “body positivity” exists. There is agreement that the exposure to images concerned with the body occurs on a daily basis. While this may occur walking past someone and assessing their looks, participants agree that social media is the main contributor to this tendency, with one person acknowledging they see these images “with every scroll”. Without actually realizing it, the participants thus confirmed the ever-present tendency to engage in social comparisons. Further, one interviewee stated that, “people are just showing off their bodies all the time” while someone else discussed the fact that social media is, “very focused on, like, self-image”.

Such a trend of visual self-expression also supports the identification of social media platforms as the main hub for the body positivity movement. Participants state that they observe

trends in their social media environment in which non-conformity to beauty ideals are promoted as acceptable and beautiful. There is agreement that the “definitely really popular” body positivity movement is, “a big push... to say you’re okay the way you are”, and that it is, “spreading the word that it’s okay to be any shape and form”. As another participant put it the body positivity movement, “is probably anti media ideals of beauty, showing that there is more than one”. Although most participants further reveal to have struggled with their body image in the past, saying they had, “pretty bad experiences”, “my own image is horrible”, or, “my body image was pretty crappy there for a few years”, they also show a distinct concept of what body positivity is to them. This revealed that there is, in fact, a general understanding of the concept.

Here, the main point of discussion was the fact that a benevolent relationship to one’s body is grounded in good care of oneself. The quotes, “I think that one way of loving yourself is taking care of your body” and, “[...] feeling good about myself, feeling good about my activity level, my general health” clearly show the trends for all participants’ concept of body positivity.

Image preferences. Overall, three main themes were identified: “Instant gratification needed”, “inspiration provided”, and “positivity wanted”. First, “instant gratification needed” centers on the creators’ apparent need to receive validation for their posts and to the apparent gratification received through attention and support from other Instagram users. Second, the theme “inspiration provided” details the participants’ opinion of the impact that these body positive posts have on viewers. Third, “positivity wanted” was established through the interviewee’s personal preferences of an overall positive message, empowering others and showing general benevolence.

Instant gratification needed. Participants identified the reason behind people posting these images as the need for instant gratification and attention, “Instagram is an easy way to get

validation. You can find people who like what you like and then, when they follow you, they just like everything because you all like the same things”. Interviewees further recognize the captions as an attempt to fulfill a need for validation and a want for support, “They’re posting it on a forum where they’re kind of hoping that people will be supportive and they’ll get compliments”. Although not explicitly recognized as such, this attempt to receive validation from others on their social media platforms again points towards the construction of an idealized digital personality – in this context, the self-presentation is targeted towards people interested in the body positivity movement. By constructing their posts in a certain manner, users ensure receiving attention from others. While this is not directly identified by participants, they all appear to have an innate understanding for this ultimate goal of online self-presentation, “I also feel like in a way they’re posting it for themselves. [...] I want to show the world I’m confident and by posting this, I will feel more confident myself.” Although this need for gratification was further labeled as “semi-exhibitionist behavior” and “ego-stroke”, participants also claimed that, “people are trying to fight back against the constructed beauty ideals in society,” which introduced the second theme.

Inspiration provided. Despite this clear want to be validated by others on Instagram, the messages in these attention-seeking posts are also identified as positive and empowering, “their confidence wasn’t stemming from the way they look, their confidence was stemming from inside and it... and it encompassed the way they looked”. The intended message behind the posts was identified as being inspirational to individuals who do not experience body positivity: “I think these posts are gonna be helpful for themselves but these people I think also want to help society”. The captions detailing personal stories, anecdotes and opinions were especially appreciated as catching the audience’s attention in empowering others and providing inspiration to the viewers. One participant in particular recognized the positive impression he / she / they

made, “I think the images affect me less than the caption for most of them”. Another participant states that, “I do think the people posting them are specific about posting the smiles and the happy ones because they want everyone to be happy”. This lends support to the unique construction of the digital personalities of individuals that are involved with the body positivity movement. As this phenomenon is characterized by mutual empowerment, Instagram users present themselves with a positive front and situate themselves as encouragement to others through their honest captions and non-conforming images. The effectiveness of this construction was unknowingly verified by the participants who agree that these constructs are a positive way of encouraging, “other people who are not feeling confident in themselves.” Additionally, the positivity that creates this approval for the posts became a major element of discussion and is thus discussed separately.

Positivity wanted. The fact that posts concerned with body positivity on Instagram seem to follow a theme of personal stories, motivation, and inspiration to start a journey of self-love resonates well with participants. The interpretation of these messages is clearly highly subjective as one of the participants recognizes, “a picture can be interpreted in a bunch of different ways”. Although this is certainly true, participants appear to agree on preferring messages that display a positive connotation. As established in the discussion of the content analysis, an underlying theme of positive outlooks and benevolence towards others and the own body can be found in the images of the sample. By committing to this theme, creators of body positive messages on Instagram communicate a message that is well received by their audience, “Whether I liked them or whether I don’t like them really had to do with how positive they were”. Although this is clearly a personal preference, the need for posts that “add a positive spin” and show, “a cool

benefit of social media” can be labeled an overarching theme in all interviews conducted in this study.

This preference is further supported by the interviewees’ reaction to a post that depicts a woman in a wheelchair flipping off her audience paired with an aggressively worded caption (see Appendix D, Figure D-1). Throughout all interviews, participants identified this behavior as unnecessary and took it as an insult to them as the viewer. The message of the image, the caption of which reads sentences such as, “This is me. This is my body. I am disabled. Get used to it or get out. Fuck your beauty standards” (Allegra, 2017), generally received positive feedback and support from the participants. However, the way in which this message was presented was not received well by the audience. One participant for instance stated, “she is being very rude and, I don’t know, again, I look at this and I’m like, ‘wow. You’re great! But at the same time, don’t flip me off!’”.

Another post that most participants disliked was one that detailed on the creator’s weight gain. The female Instagram user uses the caption to detail how she gained weight and feels comfortable with it, “Idk about you but I’d rather weigh more and have a nice booty than weigh less and be a little string bean” (Tebben, 2017). While this is certainly an empowering message, it is again the way in which it is communicated that participants did not appreciate. As one interviewee states she, “very much outlined a stereotypical, like, this is the perfect, like, body in our society”. It is further addressed by another participant how this user discriminates a certain group of people from self-love, “there are girls who are string beans and I think that the body positivity movement is supposed to stretch both ways”.

Conversely, one image that was uniformly liked by all interviewees shows a black woman laughing into the camera (Appendix D, Figure D-9). This happy mood is further

underlined by the post's caption that reads, "I'm literally lit off my own energy" (curvesarentmyproblem, 2017) and goes into detailing the fact that knowing one's path leads to joy and enjoyment. All participants agreed that this post communicates positivity through the image, giving statements such as, "I don't know, it might be staged and it probably is [...]. But it looks like she's laughing and enjoying herself and that she's comfortable in her skin", "I really liked what she said", and, "she just like looks like really happy and just, like, promotes like a really, 'oh, like, you're having a good time.'" One participant further connects the woman's positivity to the body positivity movement itself by stating that she seems to be, "fully on board with the movement" due to her apparent happiness.

The fact that participants expressed a liking for images and captions that communicate a benevolent and positive message and attitude shows that the self-presentation of body positive Instagram users is fulfilling their need to receive support from their viewers. The messages constructed for posts in the body positivity movement on this platform are thus constructed in a way that is received well by the audience.

The movement towards a different set of social comparison based on body positive Instagram users creating a shared ground and means of identification with their viewers became apparent in the interviews as well. Many participants recognized their own, previously discussed struggles with body image and body positivity in the posts they saw. One female interviewee, for instance, noted how a post discussing weight gain (Appendix D, Figure D-10) reflects her own issues with muscle mass, "this person actually talks about, with, you know, if you want to gain muscles you'll have to gain weight and what not. The specific reason why I like that one is, according to the body mass index, I'm actually classified as obese." Another female participant particularly states that she appreciates an image of an overweight woman in a bathing suit

(Appendix D, Figure D-5) because, “that girl looks like me. And she is owning that she is in a bathing suit and as much as I hate getting into that bathing suit, I do it because I want to go into the water.” This shows how the body positivity movement cultivates mutual approval and cultivation of support between individuals who differ from society’s beauty ideals. While the body positive posts under consideration here allow their creators to be validated in their doing, their images and captions also communicate inclusion and support to their viewers.

Conclusion

Although the body positivity movement as displayed on Instagram has not yet fully gained the attention of the academic community, the public appears to already be quite aware of it. As one participant words it, “the implicit message between all [images] is that people are aware that there is an acceptable body type and an acceptable body standard”. The center of the body positivity movement on Instagram is created by individuals who dedicate their digital personalities to constructing messages that challenge this commonly accepted norm of physical appearance. Posts tagged with #bodypositivity and #effyourbeautystandards discuss body positivity more or less openly but most often depict individuals who do not identify with the societal norm for physical attractiveness.

Since the movement is mainly concerned with appearance, Instagram provides a fitting hub to individuals who are actively seeking to, “fight back against the constructed beauty ideals in society” and reach out to interested parties. By posting images that are non-conforming with the idealized body and posting captions that fall outside the norm of perfection, they introduce this new phenomenon to a broad range of Instagram users. The construction of body positive messages furthers this display of honesty through the revelation of personal stories and struggles that users are overcoming on their journey towards a more body positive attitude. For the body positivity movement, the concept of the idealized self-presentation and the perfect front changes towards a more honest and approachable digital personality that transgresses social comparison and establishes a more mutual connection between creator and viewer. Through personal stories and revelations the creators of body positive posts construct messages that not only communicate a benevolent front but also stress commonalities and understanding. These messages are

constructed in a very personal manner, directly addressing viewers and are commonly kept positive.

This positivity and general benevolence towards others is also the main contributor to receive positive feedback from viewers and achieve the goal of gratification as identified by participants in this study. By telling personal stories and encouraging their viewers to take action towards a more empowered body image, body positive advocates construct messages on Instagram that function as support for others, as well as for themselves since the attention inherent to social media platforms allows gratification. This approach is achieved through a colloquial use of language and a frequent choice of personal pronouns that create intimacy between the poster and his/her/their audience. Furthermore, the choice of words in all posts clearly centers on benevolent wording and phrases such as “body appreciation game” that create topics detailing self-care, weight, or mental health. As a result, the message participants perceive in these posts can be summarized as follows: “I feel like the message for most of these is honestly that you can be comfortable in your own skin, whatever your size is”. Overall, the audience further identifies the messages constructed within the body positivity movement as beneficial and, “trying to bring attention on a movement to make the world better place”.

Limitations

As per limitations, the limited nature of the qualitative approach to this study and the absence of a tool to standardize and automatize data collection made human error a part of the research. During data collection, there were instances when images were collected double or data were found not to be compliant with collection requirements and were wrongly included at points of data collection; these images ultimately had to be discarded at initial viewing of the sample to maintain integrity but skewed the ultimate sample size.

Additionally, Instagram posts were collected through the researchers personal Instagram account. Due to the researcher's own viewing behavior and interests the types of posts collected as a sample could have been influenced by the Instagram algorithm to show typically appreciated images. However, due to the employment of the search option on the platform, this risk was minimized as the top posts should be the same throughout the platform. Another factor to consider here is the manner in which data was located; utilizing only two hashtags to identify relevant posts limited the diversity of the data as there are large numbers of hashtags used to group a post with the body positivity movement.

The subjective nature of research needs to be addressed as well. Although the researcher used caution to stay objective while analyzing the sample data, subjectivity and inherent bias can never be fully excluded from analysis. The findings of this investigation are based on one researcher's insight into the movement and conclusions drawn between theory and Instagram posts. There is the possibility that another researcher would come to a different set of conclusions when working with the same data set. This subjectivity of analysis also needs to be recognized in the identified intentions of Instagram users posting images concerned with the body positivity movement. While the researcher identified the perceived intentions based on textual cues, the poster themselves could have utilized a different set of reasoning.

Finally, the researcher's physical appearance, which ranges close to the social norm of accepted body size, has to be noted as a potential limitation during the interview process. The assessment of the interviewer's physical appearance by participants could have prompted them to share different sets of information. Due to the process of social comparison in interpersonal interactions, the participants could have felt the need to share an adjusted form of their opinions because they perceived themselves as different from the interviewer.

Future Research

Investigating an emergent social movement such as body positivity constitutes a relevant opportunity for academic research. This, in combination with the material that is provided to investigators through social media platforms, shows how much more attention this movement can and should receive from researchers in the future. The current study explored the very basic message construction of body positive posts on Instagram and thus provided a foundation for future research. The investigator suggests that projects to come should both broaden the analysis of the body positivity movement to include other social media platforms, such as Facebook or Twitter, as well as expand the period of data collection to verify and expand the findings of the current study. The expansion of the study should then also include a cultural aspect of body positivity. Although the sample for the current study did show diversity, the majority of images depicted white female Instagram users. It would be interesting to expand this research to include the cultural aspects of beauty ideals and compare cross-cultural differences for normed beauty. Through the popularity of social media across cultures, these beauty ideals are reinforced and further constructed (Frith, Shaw, & Cheng, 2005).

While the importance of widening the spectrum of obtaining data is evident, there are also many reasons to narrow the investigation and explore specific aspects of the movement specifically. For instance, during this study, it became clear that there are a growing number of popular Instagram influencers who are posting images solely to promote body positivity. These individuals have large numbers of followers and have made body positivity their career. It would be interesting and relevant to conduct a case study to learn how these influencers construct messages and receive feedback from others. While this current study mostly focused on the content of posts and limited the investigation of perceptions people have of these images, the

audience's feedback should also be considered. Given that social media platforms provide vast material on these responses, a study should gather information on the commentary section of at least one social media platform.

Finally, future research concerned with the body positivity movement should aim at answering one question: Are we currently observing a user generated construction of a new norm for body image? With the large number of users promoting body positivity and a new body standard, we should start to see the media complying with these new ideals more than it already does at this point. The emergence of this new norm should definitely provide rich data for future analysis and interesting implications for a society influenced by the media.

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Image A-1. Flyer 1 with notes.

You're fat. That is not something to be positive about. It can cause health issues. It is a sign of complete lack of self control. Go on a diet, hit the gym, don't accept an unhealthy lifestyle.

Body Positivity on Instagram

What messages does social media give you about your body?

Tell me what you think.

Help us understand the messages constructed by the body positivity movement on Instagram.

Give us **30 to 45 minutes** of your time. Give us an **interview**.

Contact Nike Bahr for an interview (nbahr2@alaska.edu)

Beauty

*DARK = fat?
A more common theme is long hair = fat*

To you: Genetically speaking, people have great diversity in there looks and what would be a normal healthy weight. A person could be what is considered fat, but still perfectly healthy, normal blood sugar levels, heart beat, everything

For questions about participation contact:

Amy May
amay11@alaska.edu

UAF IRB
Phone# 474-7800
uaf-irb@alaska.edu

In every Shape and size

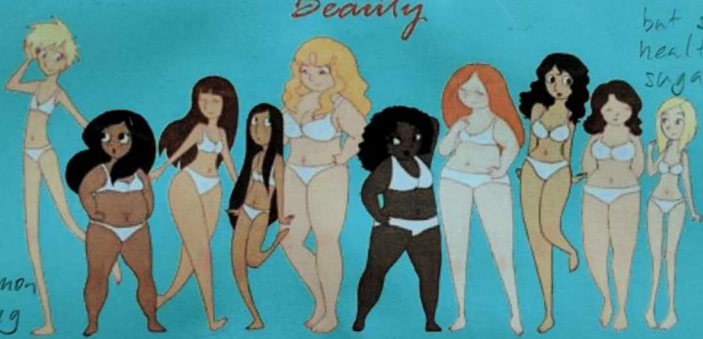


Image A-2. Flyer 2 with notes.

stop encouraging obesity!

A Healthy body IS best.
HOWEVER,
teaching young women that unless you have a thigh gap and zero muffin top is terrible.
The amount of photos that are posed to only show women's bodies a certain way is outrageous.

Body Positivity on Instagram

What messages does social media give you about your body?

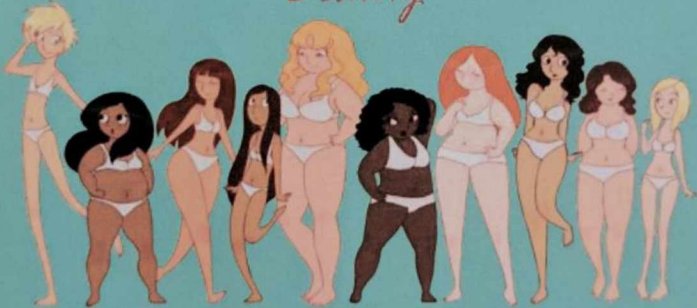
Tell me what you think.

Help us understand the messages constructed by the body positivity movement on Instagram.

Give us **30 to 45 minutes** of your time. Give us an **interview**.

Contact Nike Bahr for an interview (nbahr2@alaska.edu)

Beauty.



In every Shape and size

For questions about participation contact:
Amy May
amay@alaska.edu
UAF IRB
Phone# 474-7800
uaf-irb@alaska.edu

Appendix B

Interview Protocol.

Part 1:

1. How often do you use IG?
2. How do you define a healthy body?
3. What do you know about the body positivity movement?
 - a. Where do you encounter it?
4. What is body positivity to you?
5. What experiences do you have with body image?
6. How often do you find yourself exposed to images concerned with the body?
 - a. Where?

Part 2:

I'll give you 10 images now. Please take your time and look at the pictures and the texts below them. Then, please put them in two categories – the ones you like on one side and the ones you don't like on the other side.

7. Tell me about the ones you liked. What are the reasons for that?
 - a. How do these images affect you?
8. Tell me about the ones you didn't like. What are the reasons for that?
 - a. How do these images affect you?
9. Why do you think they post these images?
10. What is most outstanding in these images?
11. What do you think is the message behind these images?
12. What would you like to add to this interview?

Figure C-1. Content analysis – sample post 1.



Figure C-2. Content analysis – sample post 2.



Figure C-3. Content analysis – sample post 3.



Figure C-4. Content analysis – sample post 4.

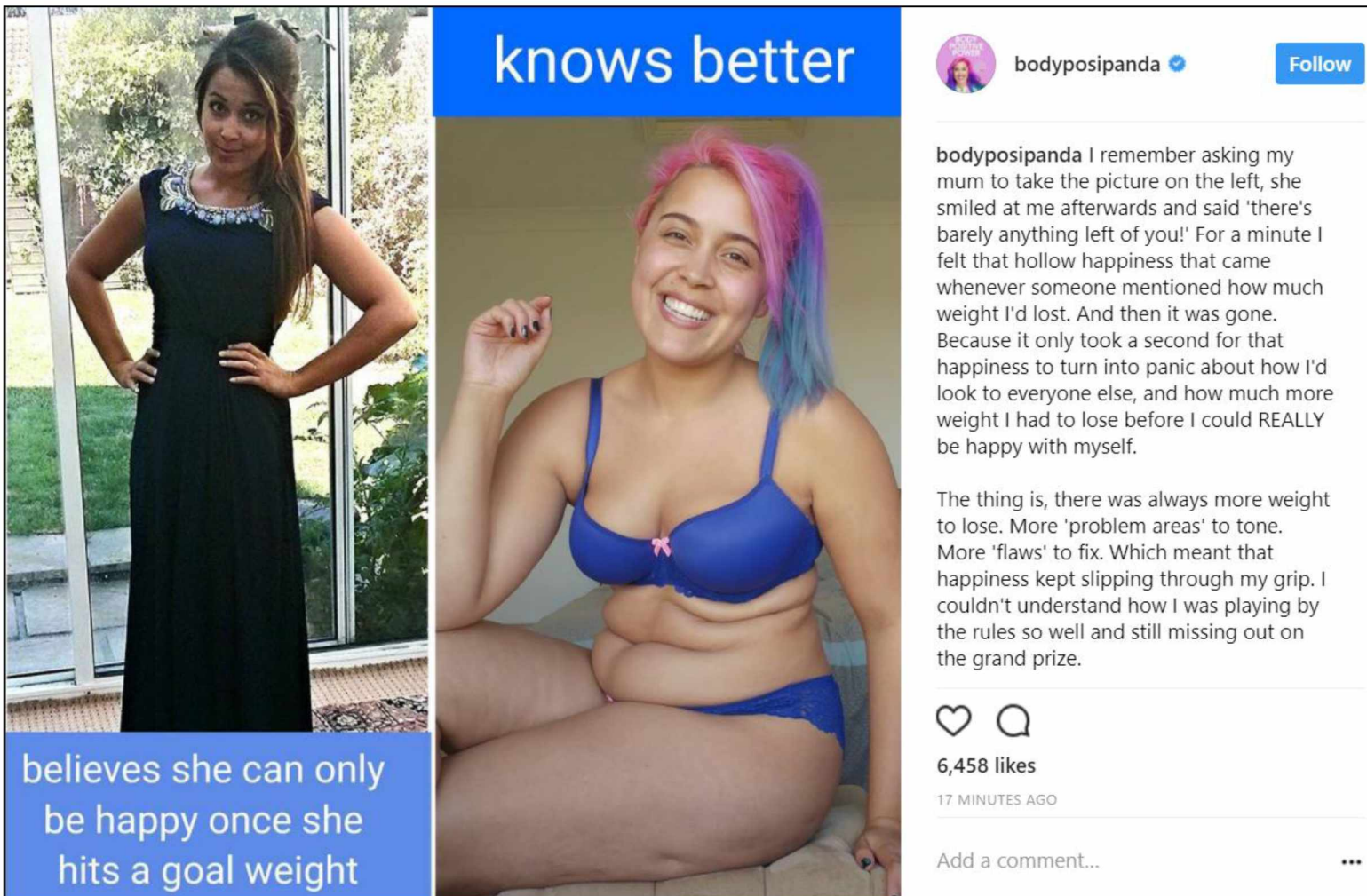


Figure C-5. Content analysis – sample post 5.



Figure C-6. Content analysis – sample post 6.

80

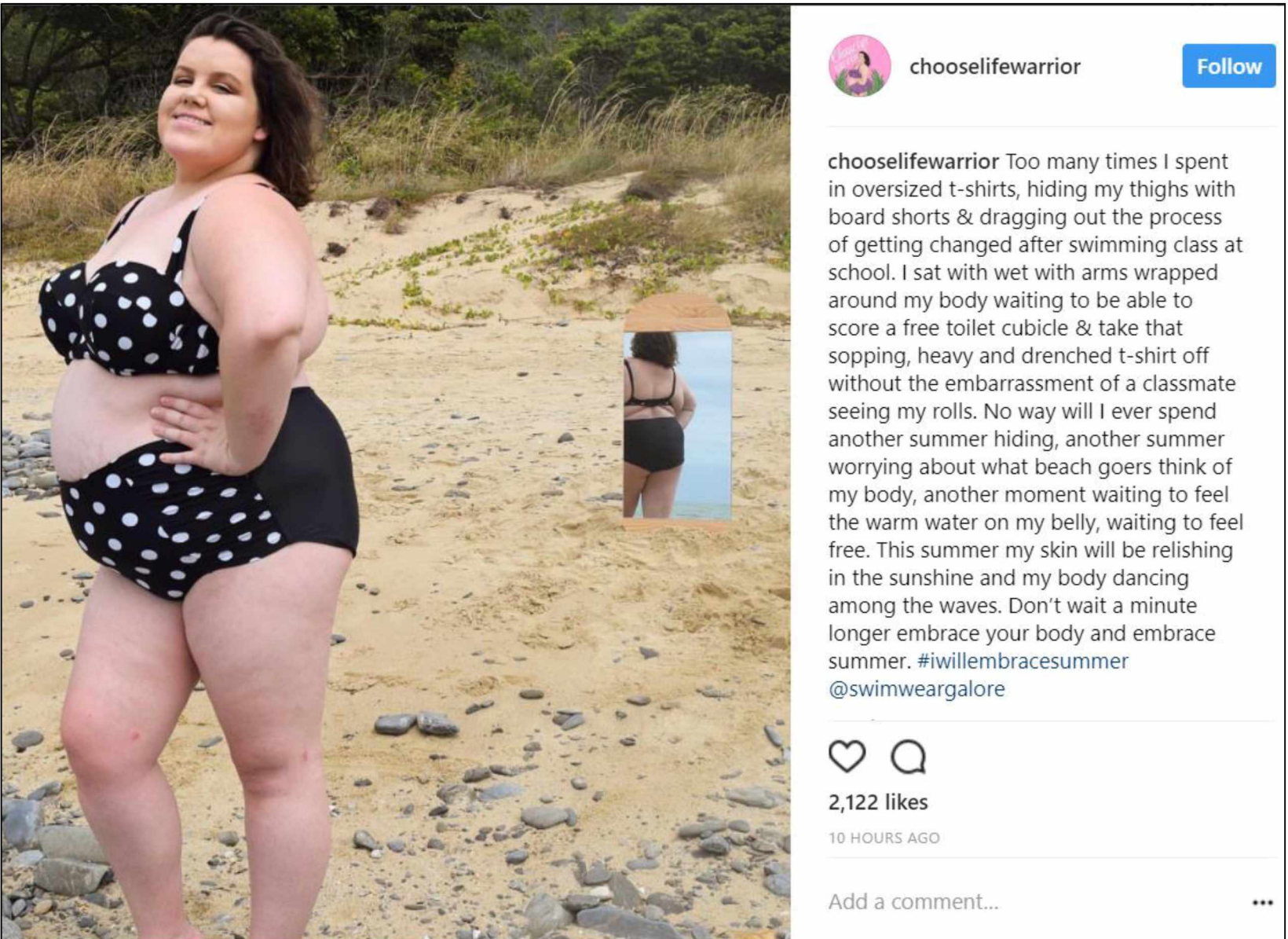


Figure C-7. Content analysis – sample post 7.



Figure C-8. Content analysis – sample post 8.



Figure C-9. Content analysis – sample post 9.

OBSESSED



HEALTHY




ownitbabe
Follow

ownitbabe You have to make choices in life. With every choice, you say "yes" to something and "no" to something else.

Saying "yes" to the body on the left means:
 Saying NO to having a social life. Saying NO to many many foods you once enjoyed. Saying NO to resting. Saying NO to dinners with friends and family. Saying NO to a cozy night in with your husband where you cook together, have some wine and have fun. Saying NO to doing meaningful things in the world, because all that is important is to maintain this body. Saying NO to ever let loose and enjoy yourself. Saying NO to thinking about anything other than your next meal and your next workout. Saying NO to your sex life and your period. Saying NO to vacations or preplanning every single meal and workout beforehand. Saying "yes" to the body on the right




2,881 likes

22 HOURS AGO

Add a comment...

Figure C-10. Content analysis – sample post 10.



Figure C-11. Content analysis – sample post 11.



Figure D-1. Catalogue Manipulation – post 1.



Figure D-2. Catalogue Manipulation – post 2.



Figure D-3. Catalogue Manipulation – post 3.



Figure D-4. Catalogue Manipulation – post 4.

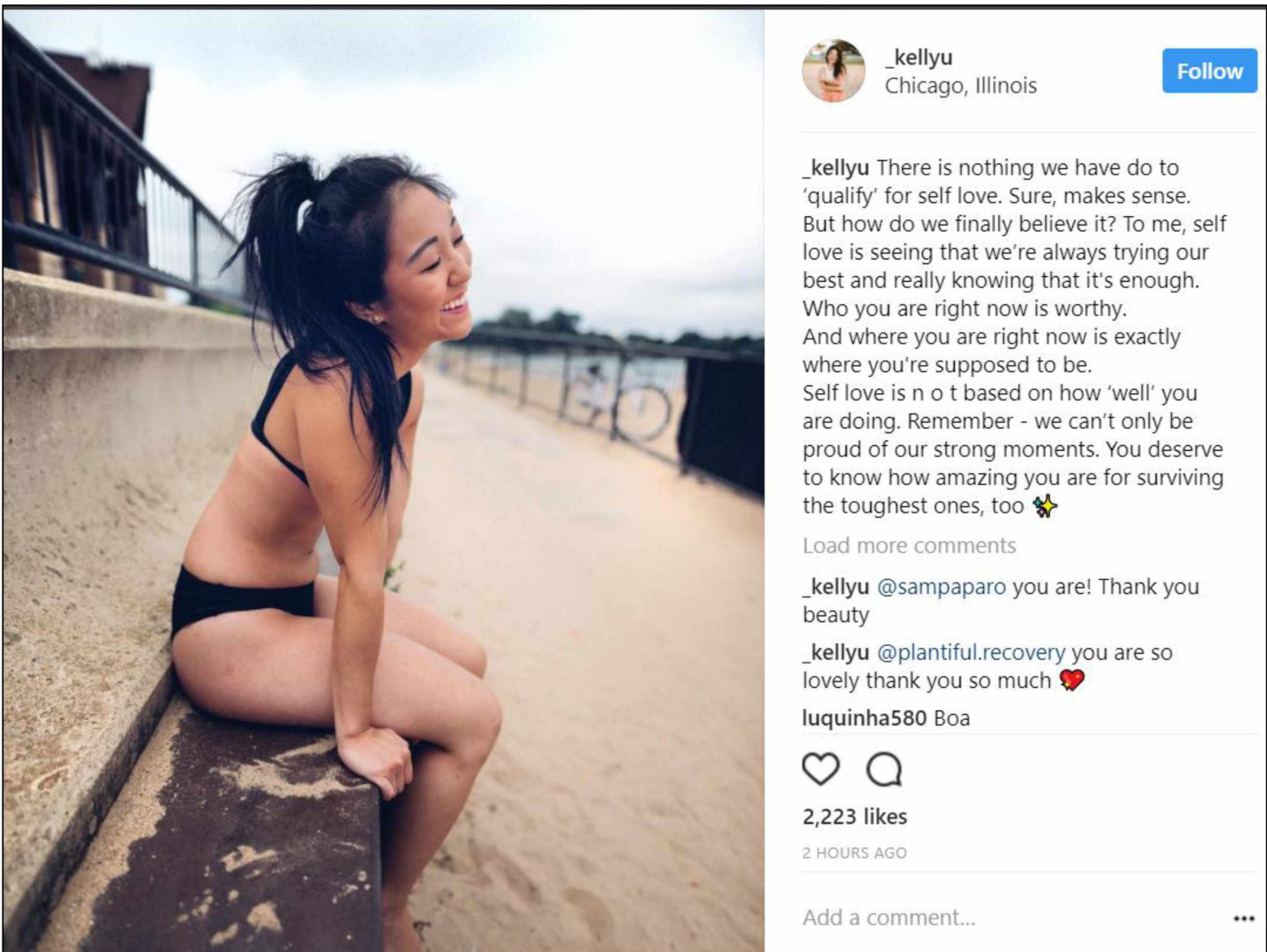


Figure D-5. Catalogue Manipulation – post 5.



Figure D-6. Catalogue Manipulation – post 6.



Figure D-7. Catalogue Manipulation – post 7.



Figure D-8. Catalogue Manipulation – post 8.



Figure D-9. Catalogue Manipulation – post 9.

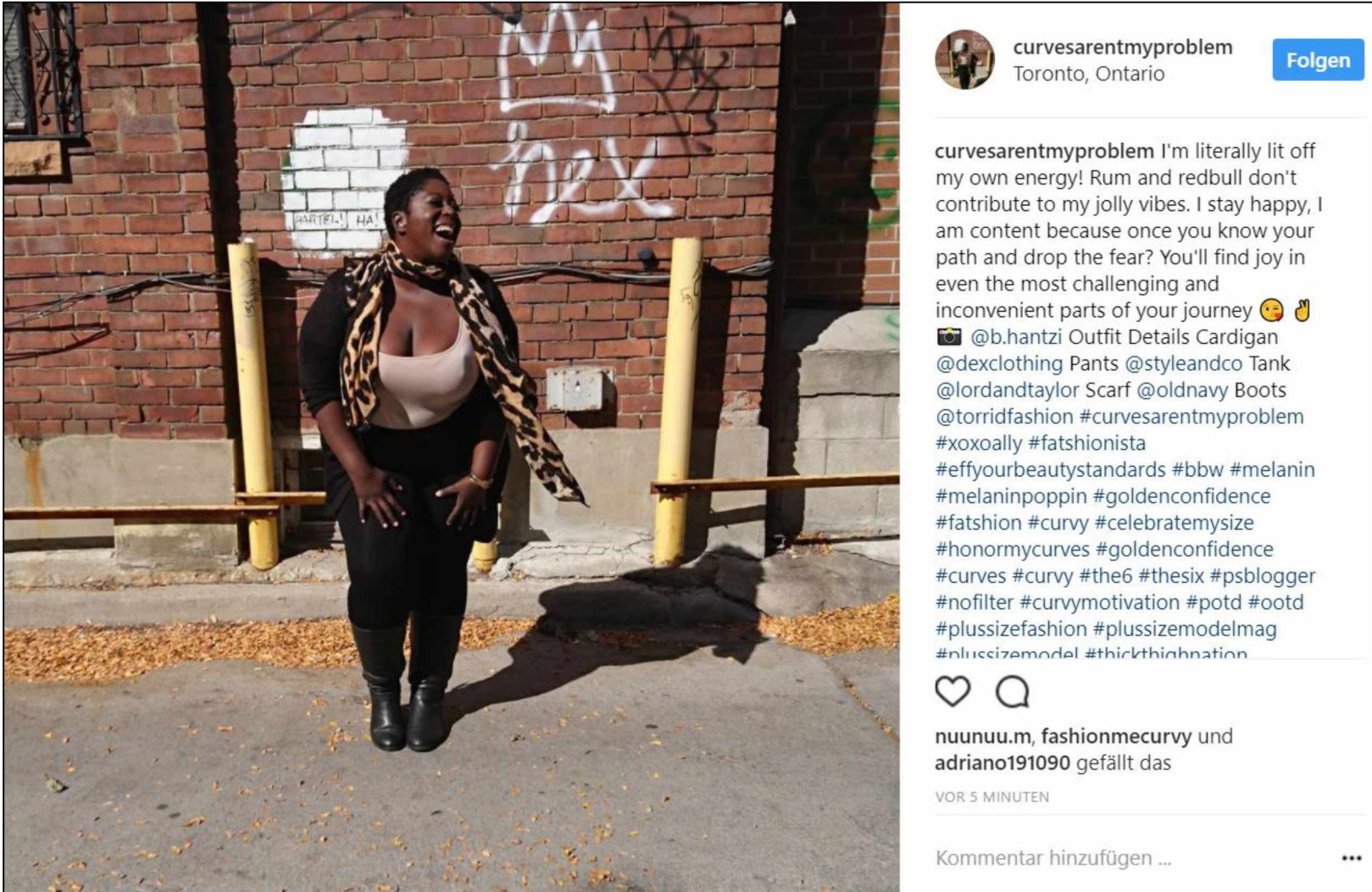


Figure D-10. Catalogue Manipulation – post 10.

